

# THE LADY OF THE HEAVENS

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(Continued.)

"Well, sir," asked Rachel, "what about the Zulus?"

"A regiment of them are coming down here on the warpath. They are hunting fugitives. The fugitives, about fifty of them, passed my camp over an hour ago, and I saw the Impi following them. I rode to warn you all. They told me you were down by the sea. I came to bring you back to your wagon lest you should be hurt."

"Thank you very much," said Rachel. "But I am not afraid of the Zulus. I do not think that they will hurt me."

"Not hurt you? Not hurt you? White and beautiful as you are. Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know," she replied with a laugh, "but you see I am called Inkosazana-y-Zoola. I won't touch one with that name."

"Inkosazana-y-Zoola," he repeated astonished. "Why, she is their Spirit, yes, and I remember—white like you, so they say. How did you get that name? But mount, mount! They will kill you first and ask how you were called afterwards. Your father is much afraid."

"My mother would not be afraid; she knows," muttered Rachel to herself, as she sprang to the saddle of the led horse.

Then, without more words, they began to gallop back towards the camp. Before they had gone far, the sun rose, the second rise the sun shone out in earnest, thinning the seaward mist although between them and the camp it still hung thick. Then suddenly in the fog-edge Rachel saw the Impi. Towards them ran a delicately shaped and beautiful native girl, naked except for her mocha, and of a very light, copper colour, and her tongue was brandishing an assegai, came a Zulu warrior. Evidently the girl was in the last stage of exhaustion; indeed she seemed over the ground, and her eyes were closed, and her head was hanging down.

"Come on," shouted the man called Ishmael. "It is only one of the fugitives whom they are killing."

But Rachel did nothing of the sort; she pulled up her horse and waited. The girl caught sight of her and with a wild, hoarse scream, redoubled her efforts, as that her pursuer who had been quite close, was left behind. She reached Rachel and flung her arms about her legs gasping:

"Save me, white lady, save me!"

"Shoot her if she won't leave go," shouted Ishmael, "and come on."

But Rachel only sprang from the horse and stood face to face with the advancing Zulu.

"Stand," she said, and the man stopped.

"Now," she asked, "what do you want with this woman?"

"To take her or to kill her," gasped the soldier.

"By whose order?"

"By order of Dingaan the king."

"For what crime?"

"Witchcraft, but who are you who question me, white woman?"

"One whom you must obey," answered Rachel proudly. "Go back and leave the girl. She is mine."

The man stared at her, then laughed aloud and began to advance again. "Go back," he repeated, "and come on."

He took no heed but still came on. "Go back or die," she said for the third time.

"I shall certainly die if I go back to Dingaan without the girl," replied the soldier who was a bold looking savage. "Now you, Noie, will you return with me, or shall I kill you? Say, witch," and he raised his assegai high.

The girl sank in a heap upon the veld. "Kill," she murmured faintly, "I will not go back. I did not betch him to make him dream of me, and I will be Death's wife, not his; a ghost in his trail not a woman."

"Good," said the man. "I will carry you word to the king. Farewell, Noie," and he raised the assegai still higher. "Stand aside, white woman, for I have no order to kill you also."

By way of answer Rachel put the gun to her shoulder and pointed it at him.

"Are you mad?" shouted Ishmael. "If you touch him they will murder everyone of us. Are you a coward?"

"Are you a coward?" she asked quietly, without taking her eyes off the soldier. Then she said to Zulu, "Listen. The land on this side, the Zulu land has been given by Dingaan to the English. Here he has no right to kill. This girl is mine, not his. Come one step nearer and you die."

"We shall see who will die," answered the warrior with a laugh, and he sprang forward.

They were his last words. Rachel aimed and pressed the trigger, the gun exploded heavily in the mist; the Zulu leapt into the air and fell upon his back. The white man, Ishmael, rode to them, pulled up his horse and sat still, staring. It was a strange picture in that lonely, silent spot. The soldier so very still and dead, his face hidden by the shield that had fallen across it; the tall, white girl rigid as a statue, in whose hand the gun still smoked, the delicate, fragile Kafir maiden kneeling on the veld, and looking at her wildly as though she were a spirit, and the two horses, one with his ears pricked in curiosity, and the other already cropping grass.

"My God! What have you done?" exclaimed Ishmael.

"Justice," answered Rachel.

"Then your blood be on your own head. I am not going to stop here to have my throat cut."

"Don't," answered Rachel. "I have a better guardian than you, and will look after my own blood. The white man seemed to be able to find no answer. Turning his horse he galloped off swearing, but not towards the camp, whereon the other horse galloped as though he were presently they all vanished in the mist, leaving the two women alone.

At this moment from the direction of the wagon they heard the sound of shouting and of screams, which appeared to come from the valley between them and it.

"The king's men are killing my people," muttered the girl. "Noie, 'Go, or they will kill you too.'"

Rachel thought a moment. Evidently it was impossible to get through to the camp; indeed, even had they tried to do so on the horses they would have been cut off. An idea came to her. They stood upon the edge of a steep, bush-covered kloof, where at the foot a stream ran down to the sea. This stream was now represented by a chain of deep and muddy pools, one of which pools lay directly underneath them.

"Help me to throw him into the water," said Rachel.

The girl understood, and with desperate energy they seized the dead soldier, dragged him to the edge of the little cliff and thrust him over. He fell with a heavy splash into the pool and vanished.

"Crocodiles live there," said Rachel. "I saw one as I passed. Now take the shield and spear and follow me."

She obeyed, for with hope her strength seemed to have returned to her, and the two of them scrambled down the cliffs into the kloof. As they reached the edge of the cliff, Rachel was right, crocodiles lived there.

"Now," she said, "throw your mocha on that rock. They will find it and think—"

Noie nodded and did so, sending its hissing and rattling in the water. Then quite naked she took Rachel's hand and swiftly, swiftly, the two of them leapt from stone to stone, so as to leave no footprints, heading for the

sea. Only the fugitive stopped once to drink of the fresh water, for she was perishing with thirst. Now when Rachel was bathing she had observed upon the farther side of her pool an opening out of it, as it were, a little pocket in the rock, where the water was not more than three feet deep and covered by a dense growth of beautiful seaweed, some black and some ribbon-like and yellow. The pool was long, perhaps two hundred paces in all, and to go round it they would be obliged to expose themselves upon the sand, and thus become visible from a long way off.

"Can you swim?" said Rachel to Noie.

Again she nodded, and the two of them slipped into the water and swam across the pool till they reached the pocket-like place on the edge of which they sat down, covering themselves with the seaweed.

They had not been there five minutes when they heard the sound of voices drawing near down the kloof, and at once slid into the water, covering themselves in it in such fashion that only their heads remained above the surface, mixed with the black and yellow seaweed, so that without close search none could have said which was hair and which was weed.

"The Zulus," said Noie shivering so that the water shook about her, "they seek me."

"Lie still, then," answered Rachel. "I can't shoot now, the gun is wet."

The voices died away, and the two girls thought that the speakers had gone, but rendered cautious, still remained hidden in the water. It was well for them that they did so, for presently they heard the voices again and much nearer. The Zulus were walking round the pool. Two of them came close to their little hiding-place, and sat down on some rocks to rest, and talk. Peeping through her covering of seaweed Rachel could see that the man who held red spears in their hands.

"You are a fool," said one of them to the other, "and have given us this walk for nothing, as though our feet were not sore enough already. The crocodiles have that Noie, her witchcraft could not save her from them; it was a baboon's spoor you saw in the mud, not hers."

"It would seem so, brother," answered the other, "as we found the mocha. Still, if so, where is Bomba who was running?"

And what made that blood mark on the grass?"

"Doubtless," replied the first man, "Bomba came up with her there and wounded her, and then he and a coward, she ran from him and jumped into the pool in which the crocodiles finished her. As for Bomba, I expect that he has gone back to Zululand, or is asleep somewhere resting. The other spoor we saw was that of a white woman, who puts skins upon her feet. There is a camp of them up yonder."

Our orders were not to touch any of the people of George, so we need not trouble about them."

(To be Continued.)

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